

Community Health Access



COMMUNITY PARTNERS, INC.

February 4, 2005
Jones Library – Amherst, MA
Meeting Notes

Attendance:

Paula	Almgren	McCormick, Murtagh, Marcus, and Almgren	(413) 528-0630
Stacey Taylor	Auger	Health Care For All	(617) 275-2935
Karen	Baumbach	Ecu-Health Care, Inc.	(413) 663-8711
Isaac	Ben Ezra	Massachusetts Senior Action Council	(413) 256-6675
Catherine	Benoit	Partners for a Healthier Community	(413) 794-7741
John	Bergeron	Hilltown Community Health Center	(413) 582-4240
Epi	Bodhi	Amherst Health Department	(413) 256-4077
Martina	Carroll	Stavros - Center for Independent Living, Inc.	(413) 256-0473
Michael	DeChiara	Community Partners, Inc.	(413) 253-4283
Maribel	DelRio	Chicopee Community Health Center	(413) 420-2152
Barbara	Diamond	Cooley Dickinson Hospital	(413) 582-2848
Brenda	Evans	Springfield Dept. of Health and Human Services	(413) 886-5072
Mary	Ford	Community Health Center of Franklin County	(413) 772-3748
Mo	Grossberger		(413) 624-3954
Charlie	Hayes	Hilltown Community Development Corporation	(413) 549-0292
Kari	Hewitt	Community Partners, Inc.	(413) 253-4283
Charles	Joffe-Halpern	Ecu-Health Care, Inc.	(413) 663-8711
Melanie	Ledford	Franklin Community Action Corporation	(978) 249-5634
Molly	Maginnis	Executive Office of Elder Affairs	(617) 222-7516
Deborah	Marchand	Western Mass Legal Services	(413) 499-1950
Sharleen	Moffat	Franklin County Home Care	(413) 773-5555
Rebecca	Moyer	Ecu-Health Care, Inc.	(413) 664-5417
Dorothy	Pilkington	Mercy Medical Center	(413) 748-9036
Anne	Rosen	Community Partners, Inc.	(413) 253-4283
Nestaly	Santiago	Health Care for the Homeless	(413) 748-9030
Ed	Sayer	Hilltown Community Health Center	(413) 238-5515
Fern	Selesnick	Community Partners, Inc.	(413) 563-8074
Cheryl	Thomson	Fairview Hospital	(413) 528-5045
Margaret	Ware	Elder Services of Berkshire County	(413) 499-0524

Welcome and Introductions

Michael DeChiara, Community Partners, welcomed everyone. After individual introductions, he introduced speakers and reviewed the meeting agenda.

Anne Rosen, Community Partners, reviewed news articles and announcements from the meeting packet. Due to the large amount of material, Anne's review was brief. She encouraged reading the literature when time permits. (*Highlights from announcements and resources are listed at the end of these notes.*)

Community Updates

Brenda Evans, Springfield Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) coordinates the federal Healthy Community Access Program (HCAP) and "Covering Kids and Families." HCAP identifies uninsured or underinsured families and assists them to access Free Care and/or MassHealth. They are currently implementing their 2005 work plan. This is each program's final year in the greater Springfield area.

Barbara Diamond, Hampshire HealthConnect (HHC), Cooley Dickinson Hospital. HHC assists patients and/or community members to obtain health insurance. The integration of HHC and Hampshire Community Action Commission's Hampshire Health Access (HCAC/HHA) programs is going well. Director Sonia Bouvier plans to increase the number of participating physicians.

John Bergeron, Hilltown Community Health Center (HCHC) and Hampshire Community Action Commission (HCAC) reported he has just begun working for HCAC's Hampshire Health Access (HHA) and is extremely busy. John would like to see two HHA outreach sites, with one in Amherst, where there is a strong need for increased healthcare access. He looks forward to greater collaboration with HHC.

Sharleen Moffat, Franklin County Home Care (FCHC), manages two DPH programs for uninsured people.

- Services include breast and cervical screenings for women and prostate and cardiovascular screenings for men. Enrollment is extremely high, especially for the women's program and Sharleen has again increased enrollment capacity. Participants either are employed but unable to afford health insurance or are elders who do not qualify for Medicaid.
- Although FCHC does not provide women's cardiovascular screenings, eight Massachusetts sites do, including Mary Lane Hospital in Ware and Springfield's Bay State Medical Center. Until CDC funding was lost four years ago, all state community health centers offered this. Requests to reinstate that service are ongoing.
- In March, *Sharleen* returns to the National Rural Health Policy Institute to request more funds and hopes to meet with Senator John Kerry.

Martina Carroll, Stavros Foundation, reported that housing issues are worsening and homelessness is increasing.

Charlie Hayes, Hilltown Community Development Corporation (HCDC). The agency provides numerous services, with elder programs focusing on healthcare and Medicaid issues. HCDC is currently working on community development block grants, after which time their attention will turn to programming.

Svetlana Muatsananyan from the BMC Health Net Plan announced that they offer bicycle helmets and cars seats for infants and toddlers who are enrolled in MassHealth.

Chip Joffe-Halpern, Ecu-Health Care, Inc. The program assists low-income, northern Berkshire residents to obtain affordable healthcare through MassHealth and other programs. They also perform patient outreach and physician education

- The agency will be hiring staff in advance to work on Medicare Part D.
- The state Attorney General's office recently awarded Ecu-Health Care a \$40,000 grant to directly purchase medications for low-income patients. A major press release will be published this month. To increase project enrollment, Ecu-Health has expanded eligibility from 125% to 200% of the federal poverty level. National studies show that patient-physician communication (or lack thereof) has a major impact on whether patients acquire and/or use medications. Ecu-Health will also work with area doctors to ensure effective communication on the subject.

Mo Grossberger, Shelburne Senior Center, introduced himself as a friend of Isaac Ben Ezra's. He has significant experience in social work and geriatrics, is available for work, and would appreciate employment leads. Mo can be contacted at (413) 624-3954 or emailed at mogberger@aol.com. Community Partners has a copy of Mo's resume.

Isaac Ben Ezra, Massachusetts Senior Action Council (MSAC)

- MSAC is expanding beyond Western Massachusetts toward Worcester. Council concerns include the future of Medicare, Social Security, our Fair Drug Pricing bill, and Massachusetts Nurses Association's Safe Staffing legislation. MSAC will be joining advocacy coalitions such as Health Care For All to support their efforts. Though he resigned as president in December, Isaac will be with the Council until the end of this year.
- Isaac produces and hosts the Amherst Community Television (ACTV) cable show "Conversations." Agencies are invited to contact him for help in using local cable networks. Elders and disabled people are more likely to watch television than to attend meetings. Cable is an excellent medium for informing them about resources. (413) 256-6675

Maribel DelRio, Holyoke Health Center, facilitates Free Care and Mass Health services for new patients.

- The Chicopee site of the Health Center at 203 Exchange Street is growing rapidly .
- There is no more waiting list for dental services at the Chicopee site.. Walk-ins are accepted every Thursday or patients can phone and be seen quickly.
- Appointments are not necessary in Chicopee, but they are required at the Holyoke dental site at 230 Maple St., 4th floor, Holyoke.
- The center accepts dental patients with or without health insurance.
- MassHealth adults automatically receive FreeCare for dental needs.
- Patients do not need a primary care physician to receive dental services.

Ed Sayer, Hilltown Community Health Centers (HCHC). HCHC has sites in Worthington and Huntington.

- Like those at the Holyoke Health Center, HCHC's dental clinic patients do not need a PCP or an appointment to receive dental care. Ed sees uninsured oral health needs continuing to be a major issue locally and statewide.
- The HCHC sites are not growing but are currently stable. They have openings for service and are performing outreach to identify need, particularly in the northern Hilltowns.

Mary Ford, Community Health Center of Franklin County (CHCFC). CHCFC is co-located with Franklin County Home Care in the old Farren Hospital building in Turners Falls.

- The dental center has one full-time and two part-time dentists serving their backlog of patients. Children are seen within a few weeks; there is a waiting list for adults. Holyoke's oral surgeon also supplies services
- CHCFC has joined Health Care For All's statewide dental care task force and continues working to influence policy makers on systemic health access problems.

- Through an HCAP grant, CHCFC is working with Healthy Connections to expand into the North Quabbin region. The area has high rates of uninsurance and deaths from chronic illness, and lacks sufficient numbers of area physicians. CHCFC's Executive Director and Board are committed to the expansion, and area residents are now on CHCFC's Board.
- The CHCFC staff hopes to bring greater numbers of uninsured people into their centers or into physician networks. Even patients with insurance require staff assistance to problem-solve paying for care.
 - *Example:* A married couple had three types of health insurance and were still unable to afford their prescriptions. Their coverage included Health New England, Medicare for the husband's disability, and sliding-scale Free Care through the CHCFC. Despite these resources, the husband had \$600 monthly co-payments for his twelve medications. Center staff sought a prescription specialist to review medications and reduce costs.

Catherine Benoit, Partners for a Healthier Community .They will be implementing two pilot programs on oral health in pre-schools.

- The first pilot provides physician education, and will emphasize the connection between oral health and overall physical health. The pilot will use training and models from various states' research to reinforce doctors' awareness of this link.
- Pilot two will train pre-school nurses and educators in rural areas of Springfield on prevention. Oral health education is currently not part of the schools' regular curricula. They get it only once a year during oral health week. Our goals are to eventually integrate preventive oral health education into curricula and to offer dental screenings and oral varnishes for children.
- The Human Service Forum will sponsor a February 9 health policy briefing. The focus will be state changes to health insurance, and their impact on Massachusetts consumers. Speakers from Health Care For All, Health New England and the Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts Foundation will discuss their perspectives. This will be an important learning opportunity and chance for western Massachusetts to have a voice. The meeting will be at the Log Cabin restaurant in Holyoke.

Health Care Access Issues for Seniors – special presentation by Deborah Marchand, Elder Law specialist and Managing Attorney, Western Massachusetts Legal Services (WMLS) Pittsfield office, and Paula Almgren, Elder Law Attorney at McCormick, Murtagh, Marcus, and Almgren in Great Barrington.

Notes from this discussion will be sent out in a separate email during the first week of March.

Health Care Access News: *Stacey Taylor-Auger*, Health Care for All

MassHealth Updates

- MassHealth Waiver: Massachusetts' federal Medicaid waiver has been renewed for three years. All programs have been approved as they currently exist.
 - Eligibility for the HIV waiver program has been permanently restored, with MassHealth back up to 200%. The state had been operating the program at that level since August, but it is significant that the eligibility standards have been officially approved.
- MassHealth Essential: The December waiting list is over and new enrollments continue at a steady pace. The original 2005 federal guidelines provided a \$160 million budget and the state capped enrollment at 36,000 people. When the 36,000 cap was reached, the state stopped enrolling people and began a waiting list – even though there was still money left in the budget. Now the federal government, recognizing that the \$160M had not been completely spent, said that up to 44,000 could be enrolled. The state expects to be able to enroll 41-42,000 before reaching the \$160M, which is now nearly depleted. Enrollment could continue up to 44,000 if additional funding is made available by the state.

Elder and Disabled Immigrants: The state recently mailed approximately 3,000 questionnaires to elder and disabled immigrant recipients of MassHealth Essential. The mailing informed them that to maintain eligibility, they must demonstrate that their sponsors have family incomes of less than 200% FPL or are deceased. Approximately half the forms were returned. MassHealth reports the state is currently weighing the affordability of continuing coverage and is considering: 1) repeating the survey by sending a second questionnaire; 2) terminating those who did not respond to the first questionnaire; 3) terminating coverage for all 3000 recipients.

2/18 update from Carly Burton, Massachusetts Immigrant and Refugee Advocacy Coalition: *MassHealth has decided to send out a second notice. Immigrants who did not return this form or returned it with incomplete information will be receiving a second notice sometime in March.*

Governor's Budget Update

- Preliminary Overview: Governor Romney released his initial FY '06 budget proposal January 26, with the final version due July 1. Despite earlier verbal support for HCFA's major reform agenda, the Governor's draft proposes no reforms and actual budget details remain vague. There is still time to advocate for change, legislative input is pending, and Stacey urged calling legislators to push for more reform funds.
- MassHealth Essential: The program is primarily funded through the Free Care Pool, and follows hospitals' fiscal year dates (Oct 1 to September 30). In 2006, the program will move to the state fiscal year, running from Oct 1, 2005 to June 30, 2006.
 - The overall budget will increase by 5.6% but MassHealth Essential will receive no additional funds.
 - Funds for elder and disabled immigrants will not be renewed.
 - MassHealth Essential will become a separate line item.
- Restoring Previous MassHealth Cuts: No restoration of services is planned (adult dental benefits, orthotics, chiropractic, etc). MassHealth projects a \$500M surplus and the Governor proposes using \$300M to prepay next year's budget, returning \$200M to the state treasury. HCFA proposes using the \$200M to restore previous benefits.
- DPH: The department has sustained annual budget cuts for several consecutive years, but 2006 programs are level-funded. An exception was a 75% cut in prostate cancer screening services. The seriousness of this cut is reflected in the following grim statistic: Black male mortality is twice that of white males due to deaths from prostate cancer.
- Prescription Advantage: Funding promises are strong, but actual details are vague., It is known that operations will be implemented as always from June 2005 until new Federal benefits begin in 2006, at which time it will become a "wraparound." It is unclear whether additional open enrollment opportunities will be available in the current fiscal year or in 2006.
- Oral Health Campaign: Participating dentists will be allowed to cap their Mass Health caseloads. Dentists have lobbied for caps for a long time. They argue that too few dentists accept MassHealth, participating practitioners are overenrolled, and limits are necessary to protect their practices.
- Mini-grants: \$250,000 is proposed for mini-grants to restart outreach and enrollment into MassHealth. This is not enough to enroll the estimated 100,000 uninsured Massachusetts residents, and HCFA hopes to see the legislature increase funding. (At one point, mini-grant funding levels were at \$1.2M).

Legislative Committee Update

- A major change this session is the creation of *five* joint health care committees. Until now, only one committee has addressed health care issues.

- Senate Committee Chairs have been chosen. House Chairs will be named in the next two weeks. Committees and their Senate Chairs are:
 - Children and Families-Senator Karen Spilka
 - Elder Affairs-Senator Susan Tucker
 - Public Health-Senator Susan Fargo
 - Mental Health and Substance Abuse-Senator Steven Tolman
 - Health Care Financing-Senator Richard Moore (Former Senate Health Care Chair)
- It is unclear which bills will be assigned to which committees. The Senate President and House Speaker will examine committee workloads and Chair preferences. Some bills – for example, MassHealth funding – will go directly to Health Care Finance committee. Others will pass through other committees first. More information is forthcoming.

Report: Massachusetts Employees Using Public Health Assistance

- The Division of Health Care Finance and Policy (DHCFP) February report discusses MassHealth use by employed individuals. The report identifies 132 Massachusetts companies with 50 or more employees where staff use MassHealth due to high-cost insurance premiums. The report offers strong arguments regarding greater employer responsibility for affordable employee health care. The content can be used to support HCFA's upcoming reform bill advocating that employers pay a certain amount of payroll tax for employee health care. Advocates referencing the report need to avoid implying that families using MassHealth are doing the wrong thing. More information is available at the DHCFP website: www.mass.gov/dhcfp

Oral Health Advocacy Task Force: Priorities

- Fund a third-party administrator for the MassHealth Dental program.
- Increase provider reimbursement rates and allow for caseload caps.
- Reinstate MassHealth adult dental benefits.
- Expand the capacity of safety-net providers like community and school based health centers.
- Implement community water fluoridation where possible.
- Begin a public awareness and education campaign (already in process).

The next quarterly meeting is March 21, 10-12:30 p.m. (Location to be announced). There will also be at least three, upcoming state regional forums. A strong focus will be advocacy for adult dental benefits. Participation is strongly encouraged.

Health Law Advocates (HLA): Lawsuit Update

Closing arguments were heard Feb. 3 for HLA's four-year lawsuit against the state. At issue is dental care for children under MassHealth. A decision is expected within six months. Stacey will supply updates. Stacey thanked everyone for their support and asked them to please let her know if they see any media coverage. She can be reached at auger@hcfama.org

Michael thanked everyone for attending and participating.

The meeting was adjourned at 12:05.

Selected Announcements and Resources

Local Community Resources:

- Cancer Connection Drop In Center: Free programs and support for anyone living with a cancer diagnosis. Pre-registration is helpful but not mandatory. For more information, call (413) 586-1642 or contact info@cancer-connection.org or www.cancer-connection.org. Cancer Connection is located in the Silk Mill at the corner of Route 9 and Straw Avenue in Florence.
- Safe Passage Support Group for Women with Disabilities: Ongoing support and discussion to increase awareness of violence in the disabled community. Meetings are Tuesdays, 2:00-3:30 pm, beginning February 1 at Safe Passage, 43 Center St., Northampton, 3rd floor. To join, telephone the Disabilities Counselor Advocate (413) 586-1125 Ext. 14.
- Free Monthly Health Screenings, North Adams REACH Community Health Foundation, 71 Hospital Avenue, North Adams (from Chip Joffe-Halpern):
 - o REACH for Breast Health offers women free monthly breast health examinations. Financially eligible women over 40 also receive assistance arranging free mammograms, PAP smears and OBGYN exams. For women with positive diagnoses, REACH arranges coordinating care, ongoing information, guidance and support. Call Carol Guernsey at (413) 664-5170.
 - o The Men's Health Partnership, funded by DPH, offers uninsured and underinsured men free monthly screenings for diabetes, cardiovascular and prostate disease. Eligibility guidelines are flexible. Contact Lindsey Murtagh at 413-664-5173.

Education and Training

- Berkshire AHEC Spring 54-Hour Comprehensive Medical Interpreter Training: Orientation March 3; classes weekly through May 26. Free to bi-lingual staff working with MassHealth providers. Contact Marie Lafayette, Berkshire AHEC, 60 Charles St., Pittsfield 013201, (413) 447-2427 or (413) 499-0370.
- Harvard School of Public Health-International Spring Symposia on Health Disparities and the Body Politic, March 3, April 14, and May 5, 2:00-5:00 p.m. For more information and registration deadlines, go to <http://www.hsph.harvard.edu/disparities>.
- Kaiser Commission on Medicaid and the Uninsured: Three new reports were released January 24 on the implications of the Medicare Prescription Drug Benefit for Dual Eligibles. Information is available at www.kff.org.

Funding

- New Assistive Technology Loan Program: Provides low-interest loans to qualified individuals with disabilities for the purchase of assistive technology (adapted computers, walkers, etc.). Contact Jason Luciano, (800) 244-2756, extension 431 or Kristina Koles, extension 428. TTY users can call (800) 564-9700. Email info@massatloan.org <[mailto: info@massatloan.org](mailto:info@massatloan.org)>.
- Delta Dental of Massachusetts' Oral Health Foundation Grants: \$2M will be available this year for projects to enhance statewide access to preventive services. **The Letter of Intent is due March 2, 2005.** Contact Kathy Myers, Executive Director of Programs at (617) 886-1113 or kmyers@deltadentalma.com. For forms, contact the Oral Health Foundation at (617) 886-1700, email ohf@deltadentalma.com, or visit <http://www.compartners.org/news>.
- Clarification on Together RX vs. Together RXAccess: There has been some confusion regarding the difference between these two. **Together RX**, <http://www.togetherrx.com/>, is a discount card for Medicare beneficiaries. **Together RXAccess**, <http://togetherrxaccess.com/>, is a discount card for people not eligible for Medicare. Neither group can have prescription drug coverage. Income eligibility limits are available on the respective web sites.